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ABSTRACT

As the baby-boom generation ages, fewer new workers will be available to fill jobs in U.S. companies. Many of the young workers who are available lack basic skills. Although the educational system must be reformed to remedy this problem, that will take time. Meanwhile, employers need other ways to maintain staffing and productivity. They could go outside the United States to recruit workers, or they could add more automation to reduce the need for workers. An easier solution, however, would be to hire Army alumni to fill their jobs. The Army produces trained personnel who have job skills, are literate, and have good work habits. Employers who hire Army alumni will get productive workers without providing extensive training. Employers can find Army alumni to hire through a new Army Career and Alumni Program. They can also use additional government resources. Most important, companies can encourage their personnel departments to look for Army alumni to fill job openings with skilled, dependable workers. Quotations from 13 sources are interspersed throughout the text. (KC)

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EXPERIENCE
FOR
HIRE

The quotes in this booklet help demonstrate the valuable contribution Army alumni can make in keeping American businesses competitive. The Army wishes to thank the authors of those statements for their support and for their help in bringing Army alumni to the attention of the broader business public.

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FOREWORD

In 1988, Denis Doyle of the Hudson Institute and I authored a book entitled **Winning the Brain Race**. *In it, we proposed a series of reforms for our public education system that built upon our own experiences within the marketplace. Its underlying tenet was that a strong society and healthy economy depend largely upon the ability of American enterprises to compete successfully with foreign companies, and that such ability relies primarily on the skills of an educated workforce.*

Currently, there is a crisis in public education. America's public schools graduate 700,000 functionally illiterate students every year, and 700,000 more drop out. Four out of five young adults cannot summarize the main points of a newspaper article or read a bus schedule. What this could mean for American companies in the very near future is a serious diminution in the quality of their entry-level workforces. It also raises the specter of increased spending by businesses to supply workers with appropriate remedial and skill training.

Recognizing that changes in the American educational system cannot occur overnight, the onus is upon all corporate managers actively to seek out alternative sources for skilled manpower that will enable our economy to remain sound and take fullest advantage of our nation's resources. **Experience for Hire** *offers one such alternative.*

Army alumni bring to business both tangible and intangible skills learned from one of the most progressive and technologically-advanced training programs available. They have actual job skills, many of which are transferable to civilian employment. In addition, they are highly motivated, disciplined and have demonstrated, through their commitment to our country, a work ethic that should serve as a strong indicator of their responsibleness and maturity.

Since we as taxpayers, both individual and corporate, have contributed to their education and training, it makes sound business sense to take advantage of this important resource. We have made an investment in their futures, and we should now reap the benefits.

For these reasons, I hope you will read* Experience for Hire *and will take appropriate action within your own companies to ensure that these young men and women are given every opportunity to demonstrate their value.

David T. Kearns
Chairman and CEO
Xerox Corporation

Experience For Hire: Introduction

For most of this country's industrial history, there have been more skilled workers than jobs. Employers have had their choice of any number of experienced people who could be relied upon to increase their productivity and competitiveness. Now, however, American businesses find themselves on a collision course with a double shortage – a shortage of workers and a shortage of skills.

"... There are some major staffing and development issues facing businesses today, and businesses cannot afford to overlook qualified applicants. Army alumni fit the mold of desirable employees."

Robert P. Forrestal
President and C.E.O.
Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta

The baby boom generation is rapidly aging, leaving in its wake a growing manpower deficit. More seriously, however, much of today's labor force lacks even the most basic of skills. This latter shortage is adding significantly to the cost of doing business. It also is raising the specter of increased inflation, constrained productivity and decreased competitiveness in an expanding world market.

"I wholeheartedly support the benefits of employing Army alumni."

Dennis R. Cobb
President and C.E.O.
Monarch and Cobb, Inc.

How can companies cope? One way is to commit more capital to remedial and skill training and consider the importation of foreign workers. Another more immediate and cost-efficient alternative is for employers to seek a new source for experience – the kind of experience Army alumni bring to the marketplace.

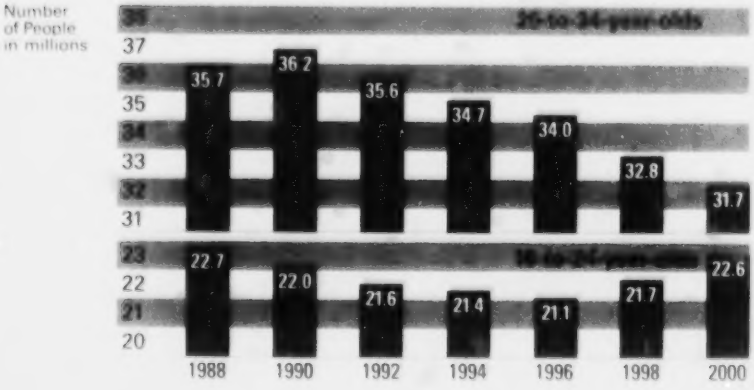
A Contagion of Shortages

In the past six years, the American economy has added 19 million new jobs. But while demand for workers has risen, growth of the labor force has slowed. This trend is expected to continue through the end of this century.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of 16-to-24-year-olds entering the labor force over the next several years will drop nearly 7 percent, from the current 22.7 million to 21.1 million, before finally bottoming out.

An even more dramatic decrease is expected in the number of 25-to-34-year-olds. From a high of 36.2 million, this traditional manpower pool is predicted to dive to 31.7 million by the year 2000.

The Dwindling Labor Supply



By the year 2000, the number of 25-to-34-year-olds entering the labor force is expected to decrease dramatically to a low of 31.7 million from a 1990 high of 36.2 million. This represents a drop of more than 12 percent.

The number of 16-to-24-year-olds entering the workforce over the next several years will decrease nearly 7 percent before finally bottoming out in 1996.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

This labor shortage could impede the growth of many enterprises. However, it is not the most serious problem confronting American businesses today. Rather, a shortage of skills, or what has become known as the "skills gap," ultimately could determine the degree to which companies remain productive and profitable.

The "Skills Gap"

According to a study released by the departments of Labor, Education and Commerce,[2] two-thirds of the employers surveyed indicated that current entry-level applicants lacked even the most basic of skills. Those included spelling, writing, mathematics, oral communication, flexibility and adaptability, problem-solving, self-direction and initiative, and attitudes and work habits.

"If America's workforce in general had the education and training found among the men and women of the Army, we could be far more confident about maintaining our economic and political leadership around the world."

John L. Clendenin
Chairman
BellSouth Corporation

Another survey of top corporate managers nationwide, conducted by Yankelovich Clancy Shulman, confirmed these results for the workforce as a whole. Eighty-six percent of the businessmen polled believed that the quality of the U.S. workforce poses a serious threat. Fifty-five percent said that erosion of the work ethic will have a major negative effect on corporate performance in the future. One executive even went so far as to identify the "skills gap" as "probably our number one problem."[3]

"The skills shortage facing businesses today is a serious concern. For many organizations, it may mean the difference between remaining competitive or just breaking even. For human resource managers, the skills shortage requires the exploration of new sources of experienced manpower. Army alumni represent an avenue that should be explored."

Ronald C. Pilenzo
President and COO
American Society for Personnel Administration

David T. Kearns, Chief Executive Officer of Xerox Corporation, defines the problem this way: "We can train employees who are educated–those who have learned how to keep on learning. We cannot train the uneducated."[4]

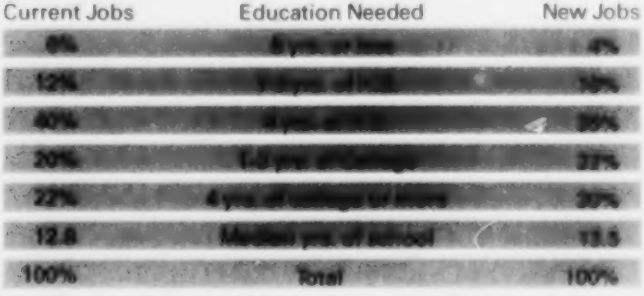
Rising Skill Requirements

The problem, however, goes further than just the current shortage of skills. Skill requirements are expected both to rise and to change frequently as companies react to international competition and adapt to new technologies:

- Eighty-two percent of today's jobs require completion of at least four years of high school; the figure for tomorrow's jobs is 87 percent.
- Twenty-two percent of today's jobs require four years or more of college. In the future, 30 percent will demand college completion or graduate work.[5]

The question is, where can American companies find these skilled workers?

The Occupations of the Future Will Require More Education



In the future, 87 percent of all jobs will require high school completion. Thirty percent of all future jobs will demand college completion or graduate work. Source: Hudson Institute

In Search of Skilled Workers

According to the Department of Education, nearly one million youths drop out of high school each year. In some school districts, the rate exceeds 50 percent.

Under 40 percent of high school graduates can understand an average *New York Times* article or figure out their change when paying for lunch. Between 17 and 21 million U.S. adults are functionally illiterate.

"America invests billions of dollars in training young men and women in the U.S. Army in a wide range of skills that have immediate application in industry. Industry should make the fullest possible use of this resource as part of the effort to enhance our competitive position in world trade."

Edgar S. Woolard
Chairman and CEO
E. I. du Pont de Nemours

If these trends continue, American businesses could find themselves crippled in the face of increased international competition. Estimates already show that American companies are spending nearly $25 billion annually just for remedial training.

This situation, quite naturally, has triggered a resurgence in educational reform. However, such reform will not take hold quickly enough to help employers who need skilled workers now. Instead, companies need to consider alternative sources of competent and experienced labor.

"The combination of experience and maturity that Army alumni bring to their jobs is well recognized. They are a reliable source of skilled manpower for the business community."

William W Boeschenstein
Chairman and CEO
Owens-Corning Fiberglas

Today's Army

Each year, approximately 150,000 soldiers separate from the Army to seek civilian employment. These Army alumni constitute a fertile source of skilled and experienced manpower for American businesses.

"In my experience, I have found that Army alumni make excellent employees. They are highly motivated and have a work ethic that is compatible with any successful business enterprise."
William C. Ferguson
Chairman and CEO
NYNEX

Not only have they been trained to a level of proficiency in certain skills—many readily transferable to civilian jobs—but they also have developed a work ethic American businesses identify as important to their success.

In addition, these alumni have met the Army's increasingly high standards for educational achievement.

Today's Soldier Population

In recent years, the educational demographics of the Army have changed significantly. Today, the proportion of high school graduates in the Army is greater than in the general population as a whole.

"Today's complex business environment requires personnel with discipline, integrity and a commitment to quality—attributes that are evident in Army alumni."
Edward A. Brennan
Chairman and CEO
Sears, Roebuck and Co.

Ninety-two percent of the men and women entering the Army are high school graduates. Approximately 16 percent of enlisted soldiers have earned bachelor's degrees. For Army officers, that number jumps to 97 percent. Many of these men and women have graduated in the top half of their college classes.

Building a Civilian Workforce

Currently, only about 25 percent of these young people remain to pursue a career in the Army after their first enlistment. The rest make the transition to civilian careers with the experience and skills necessary to help them excel in any organization. This is completely consistent with the Army's practice of recruiting and training talented men and women for two-, three-or four-year terms of service and returning them to the civilian community.

Additionally, about 12,000 people retire from the Army each year. They have held a variety of leadership positions. They know how to communicate and coordinate effectively to get the job done.

General Carl E. Vuono, Chief of Staff of the Army, has personally witnessed their value as soldiers and achievers:

"A quality force needs quality soldiers to give our small Army the flexibility necessary to fulfill strategic roles, and to make the most efficient and effective use of available resources.

"We have successfully met our high-quality requirements by attracting young Americans with a record of achievement. High achievers make the best soldiers because they are easier to train, less prone to indiscipline and more likely to complete their service commitment.

"These high-quality soldiers find Army service an excellent option; it develops initiative and qualities like loyalty, self-discipline and perseverance that are essential to success in any career endeavor.

"The Army strives to retain these quality soldiers by meeting their expectations for challenge in an exciting, demanding training environment. We recognize that many of these young people will leave the service. We are confident, however, that those who leave the Army return to society with the kind of experience that will help them succeed in their life's work.

"Those soldiers who choose to remain in the Army for a career gain many years of hands-on experience and supervisory responsibility with state-of-the-art technology. The experience of these career soldiers makes them valuable for America's labor force when they decide to retire."

Army Training

An Ernst & Whinney survey of 300 Midwestern manufacturers showed that their top priority for the next several years will be employee training and motivation. For the Army, training and motivation have always been paramount concerns.

"... Millions of Army alumni have returned to the private sector to provide the leadership, loyalty and discipline that has forged the success of the United States. They have acquired experience and hard skills from U.S. Army training. ... It is not enough to recognize their honorable service to our country while in uniform. It is absolutely necessary for employers to reach out to these veterans."

Harry N. Walters
President
Coca-Cola Foods Corporation

With the resources to develop and use some of the most technologically-advanced equipment in the world, the Army requires that all of its soldiers achieve a level of expertise and a work ethic often missing in new entrants into the workforce.

According to a Department of Labor report, the skill disparity between average labor entrants and Army alumni will widen even further over time. By the year 2000, even Army alumni skilled solely in military specialty areas will have acquired competence above and beyond their civilian counterparts in areas such as personnel administration, workload management and leadership that are so critical to today's increasingly globalized companies.

"Success in business requires both skills and discipline, and it has been our experience that Army alumni have both"

Ralph Lauren
Chairman and CEO
Polo/Ralph Lauren

Army Skill Training and Experience

The Army provides training in over 250 occupational or skill specialties as diverse as construction, cable communications, topographic engineering and finance. The training is rigorous and combines the benefits of both formal education and on-the-job experience. A large percentage of soldiers also receive a solid grounding in electronics or other underlying disciplines.

"Today's Army is producing alumni that have a keen sense of mission and purpose; a finely-tuned understanding of respect, trust and the importance of teamwork. The qualities learned and the experience gained in the Army make Army alumni excellent employees and managers."

Donald L. Fruehling
President
Maxwell Macmillan International
Publishing Group

Many of the occupations are comparable with civilian jobs, enabling American businesses to alleviate some of their cost burden of training. Specific career management fields include administration, engineering, medicine and public affairs. Army alumni also carry with them the potential of trainability.

"Army alumni are providing companies like Fluor with that most valuable of all assets – a skilled workforce to help us face the future with confidence."

David S. Tappan, Jr.
Chairman and CEO
Fluor Corporation

Several studies indicate that once an individual has been successfully trained in a single skill, there is a strong probability that a second skill will be easily learned. Since corporate investment in employee education and training – now estimated at $80 billion a year – could double by the year 2001, American businesses have much to gain from taking advantage of the experience of Army alumni.

The Army Work Ethic

Army alumni, however, are more than just job-skilled and trainable. They also possess strong leadership and management skills, as well as the self-confidence and motivation necessary to help American businesses remain productive.

> *"More than forty years in business has taught me what the Committee for Economic Development's extensive research among business leaders confirmed: academic skills are an important qualification for any employee, but good work habits are equally essential. . . . Few experiences are as effective at instilling those characteristics as a tour of duty in our armed forces."*
>
> Owen Bradford Butler
> Retired Chairman
> Procter & Gamble

According to a study presented at the American Psychological Association's 96th Annual Convention,[7] Army alumni have valuable global work skills such as leadership ability, respect for authority, and an ability to work with others and make decisions that are necessary in most jobs regardless of specific job description. This is the kind of work ethic most often sought by industry.

In its survey of hundreds of employers (Fortune 500 companies, mid-size and smaller businesses), the Committee for Economic Development found that employers want workers who:

- display pride and enthusiasm in doing their work;
- can set priorities and work under pressure;
- can function as part of a team;
- can adapt to physical and safety demands; and
- can absorb training quickly.[8]

Army alumni bring these personal qualities to every job they undertake.

Transferability Of Army Skills

In the past, the Army has been criticized for not giving its soldiers marketable skills. Evidence exists, however, to refute those claims.

Competitive Skill Transfer

According to a 1984 survey conducted by Ohio State University,* 50 percent of all Army alumni had transferred their occupational skills to civilian jobs. This compared favorably to a 48 percent rate of transfer by graduates of proprietary business schools and vocational/technical colleges.

Even when the comparison to civilian training was extended to include businesses training their own employees, the aggregate rate of transfer increased to only 56 percent. The study's principal author concluded:

"The degree of transferability of skills acquired in the military varies by occupational specialty with the lowest rate found in the combat specialties.

"Given that some portion of military training is by definition specific to the military, the percentage of transferable skills is impressive.

"The probability of skill transfer between military training and civilian employment is on par with that of most business schools and vocational/technical institutions."

In addition, approximately half of all Army skills are recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor as skills that can be apprenticed.

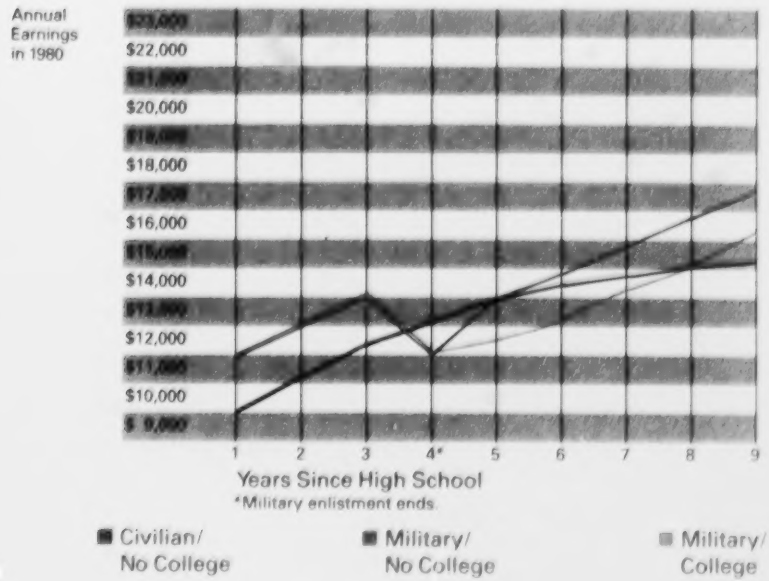
Performance Of Army Alumni In The Civilian Workplace

Many Army alumni attribute their success in business to their military experience. Studies conducted by the Temple University Center of Labor and Human Resource Studies confirm this.[12]

The Intrinsic Value of Army Alumni

Using data collected over 19 years, the Temple study compared the earnings of Army alumni with those of similarly qualified and educated high school graduates. The results

Economic Performance of Army Alumni in the Workplace



Source: The Economic Returns to Military Service

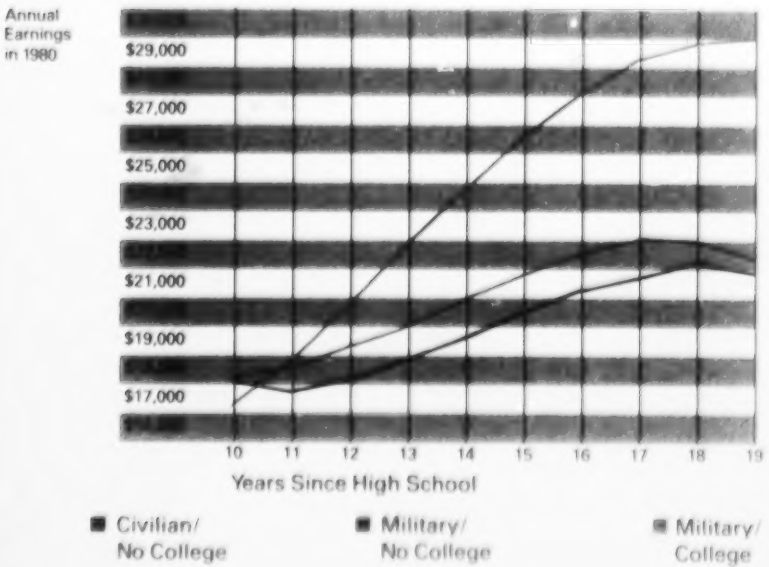
clearly showed that Army alumni had greater financial success. Such success points to the responsible job performance and promotability of Army alumni in the civilian workplace.

In particular, the study cited certain aspects of the Army experience as being directly responsible for these results:

- work attitudes like self-confidence, social maturity and acceptance of legitimate authority;
- opportunities to develop and display leadership skills;
- technical training; and
- increased educational opportunities.

These conclusions are consistent with the findings of the Committee for Economic Development.

Economic Performance of Army Alumni in the Workplace



Source: The Economic Returns to Military Service

Conclusion: Forging Strategic Alliances

For employers, the problem of a skills shortage is not going to disappear in the next decade. Economic and demographic data confirm this. Instead, the skills gap will widen, creating inflationary pressures that could potentially diminish our country's technological leadership and strong international competitive posture.

"Today's major airlines require highly-skilled personnel who are mature, goal-oriented and experienced. At Delta Air Lines, we have found that the Army alumni entering the civilian job market today possess these desirable traits and are strong candidates for many of our jobs."

Ron Allen
Chairman and C.E.O.
Delta Air Lines

But while many of us recognize that businesses cannot endure long-term, large-scale disruptions caused by lack of a competent workforce, it would appear that few immediate and cost-efficient solutions to the problem exist. Even the Department of Labor is unable to identify corrective actions that are easy to implement and do not impose a considerable economic hardship upon companies:

- increase classroom and on-the-job training and retraining programs;
- raise wages and increase fringe benefits to attract more and better workers into the labor force; and
- expand the use of foreign workers – temporary and permanent – to augment and complement the U.S. labor force.[11]

"I have long believed that Army alumni bring some very special qualities to the private sector. Their dedication – particularly in today's all-volunteer army – is obvious and companies can almost certainly count on Army alumni being hard-working and diligent. And, Army alumni bring to their jobs and to their lives a wealth of experience that is readily adaptable to the business world. We are proud to be an employer of Army alumni."

J. Peter Grace
Chairman and C.E.O.
W.R. Grace & Co.

In addition, the Labor Department's suggestion that employers reduce their skill requirements for workers by introducing greater automation into the workplace could potentially serve as a deterrent to the infusion of creativity in corporate America.

"Hiring Army alumni provides a reasoned alternative to the skills shortage. They are trained and, importantly, trainable – a valuable asset for today's companies."

Oscar Robertson
Chairman and C.E.O.
Orchem

The Army recognizes that hiring Army alumni can never be considered a total solution to the problem. However, it is one integral method companies should explore to help forestall, in a cost-efficient manner, the effects of this serious shortage.

Accessing Army Alumni

The easiest way employers can take advantage of the Army's experienced manpower is to suggest to their hiring professionals that they give serious consideration to all individuals who have received honorable discharges from Army service. As a matter of corporate policy, these alumni should have the opportunity to explain their skills wherever there is a potential job match. Even in cases where no direct match seems obvious, Army alumni should be interviewed to determine their full capabilities and motivation.

"Army alumni are included in all of the Philip Morris Companies' employment policies, not because someone asked us to, but because they deserve it and because we have found them to be highly-trained, skilled and productive."

Hamish Maxwell
Chairman and C.E.O.
Philip Morris

The Army has established a new program called, Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP). One of its goals is to assist employers that desire to hire our soldiers. The Army will ultimately have over 50 job assistance centers worldwide. These centers will provide the necessary linkage between our soldiers and outside employment opportunities.

"Army alumni have served our country and deserve our consideration for employment. They bring a unique dedication and work ethic to the job that makes them an extremely valuable human resource for any business."

Dr. James J. Renier
Chairman and C.E.O.
Honeywell

There are some tough choices to make in the years ahead—decisions that will affect generations of young Americans. The Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP) Office can give you some very enlightening, useful advice on how to put "Army Advantages" to work for your company today so you can turn your workforce around and make it be all it can be tomorrow. Pick up the phone and dial (703) 325-3111 or 325-4745. Or, you may write them at the following address:

U.S. Total Army Personnel Command, Army Career and Alumni Program Office, ATTN: TAPC-PDC, 2461 Eisenhower Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22331-0479.

"Prudential has long recognized the breadth of experience and maturity that former members of the military bring to the workplace. . . . We have found these individuals to be clearer about their career choices, more realistic about the short-term effort needed to achieve long-term goals and more likely to have the self-discipline that is one of the fundamentals to succeeding in business."

Joseph J. Melone
President
The Prudential

In addition, there are a number of other outlets around the country to help employers access Army alumni. These are listed as "Additional Resources" at the back of this book and should be pursued as part of any effort aimed at hiring experience.

Forging Strategic Alliances

As a byproduct of satisfying its own manpower needs, the Army is producing the most competent and flexible new entrants to the American labor force – its Army alumni. They have been the recipients of training in new technologies and on state-of-the-art equipment, and have used their educational benefits to pursue ever-increasing levels of achievement. In addition, they carry with them the promise of trainability.

Equally important is that, in making the commitment to serving our country, Army alumni have demonstrated a dedication and ethic that compounds their value to the workforce. For this reason alone, they deserve the consideration of the wider American public as they transition back into the civilian world.

"Someone once observed that you cannot manage troops up a hill under fire, you must lead them. Leadership is at the core of everything the Army teaches and, as the global struggles facing American businesses intensify, men and women trained to lead in the Army become an increasingly attractive pool of employees. They served all of us while in the Army, and we owe them at least a chance to 'be all that they can be' in the private sector as well."

John F. Welch, Jr.
Chairman and CEO
General Electric Company

At the same time, the American public has an obligation to itself to find appropriate mechanisms that enable our country to remain economically sound. We need to be alert to the possibility of forging new strategic alliances that can help keep our businesses competitive. By hiring the experience of Army alumni, we satisfy both of these goals.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Each year, Army ROTC commissions more than 4,000 young men and women who, in addition to serving part-time as officers in the Army Reserve or Army National Guard, enter the workforce full-time. These officers can be a valuable source of experienced manpower for American companies.

Companies interested in obtaining information about Army ROTC graduates can write:

Commander
U.S. Army ROTC Cadet Command
ATTN: ATCC-MP
Fort Monroe, VA 23651

For more information on Veterans' Employment Opportunities, you can write:

U.S. Department of Labor
Veterans' Employment and Training Service
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210

Employers can also check their Yellow Pages under "U.S. Government" for the telephone number of the nearest U.S. Army Reserve or Army National Guard unit to determine the types of specialties serving Reservists might offer the area's workforce.

In addition, companies can call the office of Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) toll-free 1-800-336-4590 to obtain information regarding Army alumni in their local communities.

For information on job fairs, business-related activities and other programs designed to facilitate placement of Army alumni in civilian jobs, call 1-800-USA-ARMY, ext 430. The operator will put you in touch with an Army Recruiting Battalion or Recruiting Company Commander.

APPENDIX

1 Bureau of Labor Statistics as cited in *Public Relations Journal* (November 1988), page 29.

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11 Stephen L. Mangum and David E. Ball, "Military Skill Training: Some Evidence of Transferability," *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 13, number 2 (Washington, D.C.: Seven Locks Press, Spring 1987).

12 Thomas N. Daymont and Paul J. Andrisani, Technical Report, "The Economic Returns to Military Service" (Philadelphia: Center for Labor and Human Resource Studies, School of Business and Management, Temple University, November 1986).

13 Report of the Secretary of Labor, "Labor Market Shortages" (January 1989), pp. 15–16.

CABINET-LEVEL ENDORSEMENTS

"In addition to an increasing shortage of labor, American businesses are also finding that today's new entrants into the workforce lack many of the skills necessary to ensure effective job performance. This is not the case with Army alumni. When you hire a veteran, you're employing an individual who has had to uphold the highest standards. Veterans have demonstrated integrity, a commitment to excellence and a determination to do the best job possible that really offers businesses an edge on the competition. With the shortage of skills that exist in the labor market today, the ability to hire experience is a definite plus for any corporation."

Elizabeth Dole
Secretary of Labor
U.S. Dept. of Labor

"By law, veterans receive hiring preference for many government jobs based on a collective national appreciation for the fact that some were injured in service and all were disadvantaged by being absent from the labor market during their service years. Experience for Hire *makes the point that veterans should receive hiring preference on a much wider basis simply because they make good employees. The case is stated clearly: military training and education, tempered by discipline and teamwork learned in important national defense assignments, spell maturity, productivity and reliability on any job."*

Edward J. Derwinski
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

AFTERWORD

As I stated in my book, The Roaring '80s, *in the 1990s, there will be more jobs in the United States than people to fill them. That's the good news. The bad news is that the young people out there won't fill many of the jobs. They simply won't have the skills.*

Currently, American public high schools are graduating 700,000 functionally illiterate students every year. Nearly a million drop out. Four out of five young adults cannot summarize the main point of a newspaper article, and many of them never see newspapers anyway.

The problem would appear to be particularly severe with respect to the sciences. According to the National Science Foundation, we are moving steadily toward "virtual scientific and technological illiteracy." Taken as a whole, says Frank Price, president of the National Academy of Sciences, it's a disaster.

In order for American companies to be competitive internationally, they have to be capital intensive. They must have the newest and most innovative machinery. But you can't operate numerically-controlled machine tools if you don't understand fractions and scales.

Obviously, our educational system needs to be reformed to address these issues. That will take time, however. In the interim, therefore, we need to identify resources within our own society that can help American companies remain competitive. Army alumni are one solution.

Army alumni, during their training, have been exposed to some of the most technologically-advanced equipment used by businesses today. They have learned tangible skills that have application across a broad cross-section of industries. They have learned how to learn.

We all know the Army experience is rigorous. And it would appear that the same standards that are adhered to during Basic Training are also applied to learning a skill and developing a work ethic that can only help contribute to a company's success.

Therefore, so long as this country is committed to paying for their training, it makes sound economic sense for companies to use Army alumni as a resource to fill their workforce needs. The contribution could be considerable, especially if we are to maintain our competitive position in today's increasingly technology-driven and globalized marketplace.

Adam Smith
Adam Smith's Money World